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TAGS: PREL PGOV IR I2
SUBJECT: CODEL BAIRD MEETING WITH FADHILA PARTY LEADER
HASSEN AL-SHAMMARI

REF: A. BAGHDAD 842

1B. BAGHDAD 452

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Representatives Brian Baird (D-WA) and Christopher Shays (R-CT) met with independent Shia Fadhila party leader Hassan al-Shammari May 22. Discussions centered on the current political and security situation in Baghdad and issues of national reconciliation. Al-Shammari explained that although he signed the 144-member Council of Representative (CoR) petition calling for CF withdrawal, he was not in favor of a timetable for withdraw and believed strongly that MNF-I should not depart until a capable Iraqi security force is in place. Al-Shammari called on the USG to pay greater attention to independent parties such as his own Shia Fadhila, which withdrew from the Shia UIA alliance March 7 (ref A), and characterized Iraq's problems as political rather than sectarian.

CF Should Withdraw...But Not Now!

12. (C) Al-Shammari acknowledged that he was among the 144 Parliamentarians who signed a petition calling for MNF-I withdraw from Iraq, but that he has added his own written caveat. "What we here from the U.S. Congress disturbs us," said al-Shammari, explaining that he believed it necessary for U.S. forces to leave Iraq "someday," but was against a timetable. "MNF-I should not withdraw until the Iraqi security forces are capable and patriotic," al-Shammari said, meaning trained, equipped, and not loyal to sectarian militia.

Iraq's Problem is Political, not Sectarian

13. (C) Asked if the situation in Iraq is improving, al-Shammari replied, "no it is deteriorating" in terms of security and services. Noting that Iraq does not have a history of sectarian strife, he characterized the problems in Iraq and political. Parliament is weak and controlled by the GOI, al-Shammari told CODEL Baird, "which is interested in consolidating power." He pointed to fighting between the two Shia Badr and JAM militias as evidence of a struggle for power vice sectarian hatred. According to al-Shammari, the Maliki government is not willing to compromise on key issues of national reconciliation for political reasons. Al-Shammari indicated that that problem is exacerbated by interference by neighboring countries. "Iran is the worst," he said, but also pointed to Iraq's Arab neighbors.

14. (C) Al-Shammari complained that American officials met only with "dominant sectarian groups" Shia Dawa (PM Maliki's Party) and SCII (formerly SCIRI), and Sunni IIP, "to you

these are the only political parties." Representative Baird pointed out that, to the contrary, "we specifically requested this meeting to hear your views." Al-Shammari pointed to his own 15-seat Shia Fadhila party, which he characterized as representative of a Shia political force that is independent, nationalistic, and has no ties to Iran.

Progress on Benchmarks

¶ 5. (C) Al-Shammari passed to CODEL Baird his party's 23-point reconciliation plan (ref B). He characterized Fadhila's program as calling for dialogue among all groups, including insurgents and militias (but not AQI), and an end to Iranian intervention in favor of Iraqi sovereignty and unity. Asked to rate which political benchmarks could most easily win the approval of Parliament in the short-term, al-Shammari rated the Hydrocarbon law as most likely to pass first, followed by debaathification reform. As for provincial elections -- it could wait until the security situation was more favorable. Decisions on the balance of central versus regional power (Constitutional Review), according to al-Shammari, should be handled last.

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